

HEIRS OF JOHN HOPPER.

[To accompany Bill H. R. No. 555.]

APRIL 2, 1860.

Mr. HOLMAN, from the Committee on Revolutionary Claims, submitted the following

REPORT.

The Committee on Revolutionary Claims, to whom was referred the petition of Charity Van Voorhies, grandchild and heir-at-law of John Hopper, deceased, late of New Jersey, asking compensation for a dwelling-house and mill burnt by the British in consequence of the military occupation thereof by the troops of the United States at the time, in the revolutionary war, report :

That they have subjected the evidence in the case to the severest scrutiny, and are forced to the belief that if it is the policy of the government to afford relief in any case where property of an American citizen has been destroyed by a public enemy in consequence of its occupancy at the time by American troops for military purposes, that the petitioner is entitled to such relief.

The history of the facts on which the petition is founded is brief; the facts, indeed, are matters of history. In April, 1780, Major Boyles, with a body of continental troops, was in possession of the dwelling-house and mill of John Hopper, at Hopperstown, New Jersey, as a garrison and a depot for arms and other munitions of war for the use of the American army. While that possession continued, and as the history of the times proves, on the morning of the 16th of April, 1780, the American forces were surprised by a detachment of British light horse from New York, and after a gallant defence, in which Major Boyles was mortally wounded, and John Hopper covered with wounds, and one of his sons and many others of the American forces slain, the continental troops were compelled to yield to overpowering numbers, when the British troops, in the spirit of vandalism, not uncommon in the history of that nation, set fire to the dwelling-house and mill referred to, the property of John Hopper, and the dwelling-house and storehouse of John A. Hopper, his son, the only buildings occupied by the American forces, and which were entirely consumed, leaving John Hopper, then an old man, covered with wounds received in the defence of his country, utterly destitute.

John Hopper was a veteran whig, and had not only involved his own life and little fortune in the revolutionary struggle of his country, but had sent eight sons into the continental army, all of whom were devoted to the last to the cause of the revolution; two of them were elevated to positions of important trust in the army, and two of them fell on the field of battle. The misfortunes as well as the patriotism of John Hopper were so conspicuous that on the 16th day of May, 1780, Governor Livingston, of New Jersey, presented the subject to the consideration of Congress in a letter, a copy of which has been furnished to the committee from the Department of State, in which he says: "Had his property been destroyed by the British merely on account of his uniform and inflexible attachment to the cause of America in a disaffected neighborhood, (for which he has been celebrated throughout the whole of our conflict with Britain,) I should not have troubled Congress with an application for compensating a loss which, having in such case suffered in common with the multitudes of his fellow-citizens, he would, I doubt not, like them, sustain with heroic resignation, and abide the future determination of Congress whether for such losses any relief will be granted. But it being *beyond question* that his house and mill were reduced to ashes by the enemy because the former had been defended by Major Boyles, commanding a detachment of the continental troops, and then quartering in it, it is evident that the said troops were as much the cause of the destruction of the house and mill as if they had themselves set them on fire." Regarding the case as coming clearly within the class of cases in which Congress has uniformly admitted that relief should be granted; finding the facts established by abundant proofs contemporaneous with the event, and the claim brought to the attention of Congress at intervals from the time it was first presented by the governor of New Jersey to the present, and never adjusted; considering the merit of the claimant, and the lively and unselfish gratitude of the American people to the noble patriots who contributed to the establishment of their priceless liberties, your committee have been unable to account for the indifference with which this claim, not on the generosity but on the justice of Congress, has been met. The committee find from the evidence that the property destroyed, not including personal effects, was of the value at the time of one thousand five hundred dollars, for which sum they report a bill.